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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses some of the issues involved in the transition of students from school to work in Australia. First, there is an overview of the Schools Commission's views on school-work transition as expressed in its reports. The reports draw attention to the necessity for recurrent education to allow every member of society to have access to publicly provided education throughout life. Each of the reports highlights the school-work transition area as one where innovative projects are needed. Next is a summary of projects, funded through Commission programs, which focus on specific efforts at the secondary level to ease the transition from school to work. A large number of the projects are related to work experience, career education, vocational advisory centres, and school based activity programs for early school leavers. The last section of the paper discusses some of the constraints and tensions governing progress in school-work transition and makes recommendations for the future. It is argued that the crucial focus for action remains with the schools and the willingness and capacity of school communities to reassess the preparation they are giving students for adult life and to adjust their approaches accordingly. (CM)

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THE SCHOOLS COMMISSION AND SCHOOL-WORK TRANSITION IN AUSTRALIA*

The purpose of this paper is to discuss some of the issues involved in the transition from school to work in Australia. After brief consideration of the Schools Commission's broad views on school-work transition as expressed in its reports, some examples of studies and projects being funded through Commission Programs are described. Finally some of the constraints and tensions governing progress in the area are discussed in relation to what may be possible in the future.

INTRODUCTION

For nearly one hundred years most Australian States have had official education policies ensuring that all children spend about ten of their formative years in compulsory schooling. Although States have espoused policies aimed at providing equal education for all children, a number of studies shows that in fact schools have had a major credentialling purpose, acting as a sorting and streaming mechanism, in particular to select students capable of matriculation and further tertiary studies.[1] Almost half of all students has left school by the age of sixteen, only about a third proceed to the final year and even fewer obtain the appropriate school certificate or satisfy university entrance requirements. In the past, the nature of the future employment prospects of young people has been largely determined by the point at which they have left school, and this in turn has been a function of factors such as social class, cultural background and geographic location.

In recent years there has been increasing public dissatisfaction with the way schools are preparing students for work. This criticism is only one aspect of general concern about schools in response to social problems - including problems of youth unemployment and changing attitudes to work as well as changing patterns of work. Schools have

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* The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author alone.

1. These include Fitzgerald, R.T. Poverty and Education in Australia. Fifth Main Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty. Canberra, AGPS, 1976.

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often responded at local and system levels by adding additional subjects such as work experience and career education rather than by undertaking a thorough reassessment of the total curriculum and beyond that, the aims and purposes of schooling. These are central to the relationship between school and work, and will determine the approaches taken by education authorities to ease transition for students in their schools.

The general dissatisfaction with schooling became a political issue in the late 1960s. In 1972 the new Labor Australian Government set up the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission to inquire into the immediate needs of primary and secondary schooling. The Committee recommended substantial increases in spending on education and the Schools Commission was established to administer programs to improve the quality of education and reduce educational disadvantage. The Commission regularly reports on the needs and standards of schools in Australia and recommends financial expenditure to meet those needs. Although the Commission has no comprehensive, definitive policy on school-work transition an examination of its published reports reveals a broad view of the responsibility schools have to prepare students for working life.

THE SCHOOLS COMMISSION'S VIEW OF SCHOOL-WORK TRANSITION: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Karmel Report[2]

The report of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission emphasised the right of every child, within practicable limits, to be prepared through schooling for full participation in society. In its discussion of community involvement the Committee was particularly critical of the past relationship of Australian schools to the wider society, questioning the isolation of schools as well as the idea that education should be confined to formal institutions and concentrated heavily on those who have not yet entered employment:

> '... education in formal institutions, separated from both the home and the world of work, has proved to be an inadequate means of changing patterns of social stratification or of initiating all young people into society. Unless our conception of education broadens to enable schools to forge closer links with other socialising agencies, the possibility of providing equal life chances for children from all types of social backgrounds is severely limited.'[3]

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2. Schools in Australia. Report of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission. Canberra, AGPS, 1973.

3. Ibid, para. 2.17.

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One possible development foreshadowed by the Committee was the school as the nucleus of a community centre, in which educational, health, welfare, cultural and sporting agencies could share in forging links between school, family, peer group and society at large. Another was the concept of recurrent or life long education which depends on schools establishing a high enough level of basic skills to enable people to return at a later stage when feeling more confident of interests and aspirations.

The 1976-78 Report[4]

In June 1975 the Schools Commission's Report for the Triennium 1976-78 gave further consideration to these issues. The findings of a study group, set up in 1975 to monitor progress in the field of recurrent education in Australia and overseas and to advise the Commission on the possible implications for primary and secondary education in Australia, were reported in Chapter 12. While continuing to support the concept of recurrent education the Commission drew attention to the need to face squarely the problems of adolescents finding difficulty coping with the traditional school environment and to modify the educational system in ways which would give everyone the right to a deferred education. It recommended simultaneous action to break down the sharp division between the world of the school and the world of work by providing '... an opportunity to reduce the isolation of the adolescent from adult society and to allow him to participate in it. These changes should form part of a general policy aimed at developing a closer relationship between school and work, and should include schemes for the exchange of teachers and people working in industry.'[5]

Along this line the Commission commended the work experience programs for secondary students developed in some States and suggested that young people would welcome opportunities to participate in worthwhile forms of community service if they were given the opportunity to participate in making decisions about the projects. A joint program of action and research in full cooperation with other interested authorities, particularly the then Technical and Further Education Commission, was proposed.

The 1979-81 Report[6]

The Commission in its 1979-81 Report raised as a major educational issue the high unemployment among school leavers and the need for secondary schools to adjust to changed economic circumstances.

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4. Schools Commission. Report for the Triennium 1976-78. Canberra, AGPS, 1976.

5. Ibid, para. 12.15.

6. Schools Commission. Report for the Triennium 1979-81. Canberra, AGPS, 1978.

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'The lines are already being drawn between those who favour a reversion to early selection in which the non-selected would pursue special programs to accustom them to likely work conditions for the poorly qualified, and those who seek a redefinition of the purposes of secondary years as requiring greater emphasis for all students on improved knowledge of the actual conditions of work and on the range of work and instruction in the society as raw material for social science study and personal choices. Such a common introduction to the society would be followed by intensive preparation for tertiary study for those who choose the path and by guaranteed opportunities for further study when desired or required for those who choose paid work.'[7]

Organisational change recommended by the Commission included action to broaden the traditionally accepted functions of the school. It recommended that programs should adapt to the social, cultural and ethnic differences of school communities by significant contact and interaction with the different experiences and values of the particular communities. The Commission further encouraged secondary schools to monitor what happens to their students leaving for further education, employment or unemployment for 'important feedback in evaluating what the school does for students and what it needs to do better'.[8]

The School and Work Discussion Paper[9]

Perhaps the most significant contribution the Commission has made to the study of the transition of young people from school to work is its discussion paper prepared in 1977. The paper was designed to stimulate further analysis and more informed public discussion as an input to the Williams Committee of Inquiry into Education and Training. The discussion document covered the principal issues concerned with the school-work relationship within the general context of the aims and functions of schooling. The implications of vocational training, career education, youth unemployment and employers' requirements for the school-work relationship were examined. Directions for future development canvassed included changes in the world of work, recurrent education and school level development.

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7. Ibid, para. 1.3.

8. Ibid, para. 1.15.

9. Schools Commission. School and Work: a discussion paper. Canberra, Schools Commission, 1977.

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Girls, School and Society[10]

In its report Girls, School and Society, a study group, set up by the Commission to assist with the development of Commission policy in the education of women and girls, devoted a chapter to discussion of vocational guidance and career counselling for girls. It found only rare instances of an appreciation of the changing role of women in the vocational and career literature it surveyed. The report recommended that schools should actively promote among girls the confidence and knowledge to choose among options by providing first hand observation and experience of a range of work situations and studies of society and social change. The Commission endorsed the study group's recommendations in its 1976-78 Report.

In summary, in the reports published by the Commission the narrow interpretation of school-work transition as the direct relationship between the student's final year of school and the first job has been rejected in favour of a view which includes all of the school's efforts to prepare children for life as adults. The Commission has assumed that there are certain common purposes associated with preparation for adulthood. These include equalising opportunity, diversifying options, human development, political participation, aesthetic and spiritual growth as well as work, family and leisure. The Commission has drawn attention to the necessity for recurrent education to allow every member of society to have access to publicly provided education throughout life. While recognising this broad view, the summary of projects which follows concentrates on specific efforts at the secondary level to ease the transition from school to work.

SCHOOL-WORK TRANSITION PROJECTS IN COMMISSION PROGRAMS: SOME EXAMPLES

General Purpose Programs

Through its two largest funding Programs, the General Recurrent and Capital Grants Programs, approximately 90 per cent of all Commission funds are made available both to State education authorities to allocate according to their own priorities and to non-government schools. In consequence the Commission's values and priorities are most evident in projects funded through the other five specific purpose programs.

Two Specific Purpose Programs

The major portion of the funds available through the Migrant and Multicultural Education Programs have been devoted to the teaching of

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10. Schools Commission. Girls, School and Society. Canberra, AGPS, 1975.

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English as a second language: without English language competence the opportunities open to students in an English language based society are severely limited. The Services and Development Program provides opportunities for teachers and others to initiate activities related to career education and work experience.

Special Education Program

The Children in Institutions section of the Special Projects Program has funded a number of institutions to prepare children for work by developing a knowledge of vocations, building self-esteem, passing on specific work skills, teaching necessary social and communication skills and reinforcing general skills which will facilitate the transition from school to employment. Emphasis is often placed on the teaching of safety habits and orientation skills in the working area. Specific courses are conducted in woodwork, domestic science, craft programs, pastry cooking, dressmaking, typing, metalwork and mechanical trades. The Department for Community Welfare in Perth has developed a Community Survival Skills Program for students from several institutions. Such skills include the ability to tell the time, read calendars and road maps, use the telephone directory, write simple letters, cope with job interviews, budget and fill in tax returns.

Special Projects Program

Innovations. In each of its reports the Commission has highlighted the school-work transition area as one where innovative projects which require additional resources might arise at local level. It is therefore not surprising that innovations projects have included a large number related to work experience, career education, vocational advisory centres and school based activity programs for early school leavers. I have chosen examples to give the flavour of the action being taken.

In the inner suburbs of Sydney two teachers have initiated a program which selects secondary students who have a record of low achievement at their school, places them in work experience situations involving art and crafts, boat building and car mechanics, and engages them in contracts whereby three days a week are spent at work and in return two days are given to school activities. The library of the Elwood State School in Victoria is producing a series of non-sexist careers booklets for lower primary school students, demonstrating the occupational options for both men and women, and attempting to overcome the bias shown in most careers information. The Catholic Education Office in New South Wales has established a Careers Resource and Training Centre which has developed inservice courses designed to create a network of interacting trained careers advisers, with emphasis on individual schools formulating and

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designing their own careers education programs to meet the needs of their students. The Launceston Student Workshop is a form of alternative education for secondary students in the fourteen to sixteen age groups which services the special needs of selected students from Launceston special and high schools, facilitates their introduction to full-time employment and monitors their transition with a follow-up supervision program. Students at Sandringham Technical School in Victoria conducted a survey of the employment situation of students leaving the school in 1976, to develop an awareness of problems facing school leavers then and themselves in the future, and gain organisation, survey and assessment skills.

National areas of interest. Apart from the innovations section of the Special Projects Program, funds have been set aside for specific national studies in school-work transition. The Victorian Department of Education has been funded to describe activities which provide secondary school students with experience of real or simulated work situations in Australia, clarify the relationships of these activities to guidance services and career education, study the range of opportunities for re-entry and the current potential contribution of schools, develop proposals for further action, and draw conclusions and implications for the development of policies. The Victorian Institution of Secondary Education will study the implications for the school curriculum of the transition to and the early stages of working life in the community, and the effectiveness of schools in reconciling competing claims on the curriculum.

In addition, strategies for assisting children in the transition from school to work are encouraged in specific study areas such as education for the handicapped, girls and country children. The South Australian Education Department is examining special measures favouring the employment of the handicapped, the role of the school in preparing handicapped youth for employment, the problem of assessment of school leavers and the kind of services available for facilitating their transition from school to working life. A comprehensive review and analysis of existing Australian research in the area of early school leaving behaviour particularly as it affects girls has been conducted. The Department of Education in Western Australia has been funded to develop a classroom based action-research approach to non-sexist career education with the support of the school community. A longitudinal study is being organised by the Tasmanian Department of Education which involves a survey of four hundred country school leavers in Tasmania, Western Australia and Queensland to determine the direct social outcomes of secondary schooling.

Disadvantaged Schools Program

As both disadvantaged schools and disadvantaged country areas are selected on the basis of the socio-economic characteristics of the communities they serve, they have a high incidence of early school

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leaving, and unemployment among their school leavers is higher than average throughout Australia. The majority of the 305 secondary schools participating in the Program have given particular consideration to the problem of unemployment and there has been a strong emphasis on improving standards of vocabulary, comprehension, language development, numeracy, and other academic skills. Pastoral care of students has been an important feature of most programs and students are encouraged to develop social competence and self-esteem. The following examples highlight the diversity of approaches to school-work transition taken by schools and areas in the Program.

Work experience. Parents of children in schools in both programs are particularly concerned about career opportunities and job training, and in a number of cases schools and communities have mounted joint programs giving students the opportunity to work for a few days in selected occupations. A special in-school work experience program at Shalvey High School in New South Wales provides students with their first experience of working under supervision, obtaining practical work experience while still attending school. In the North Central Disadvantaged Country Area of Victoria a network of careers teachers has been established to coordinate students' visits to local factories, broadening horizons in an area where career options are limited and increasing student awareness of the role and operation of local industries.

Specialist staff. School counsellors, social workers and other specialist staff have been employed to assist students in school-work transition and there has been extensive liaison in a number of districts between schools and outside agencies. A curriculum coordinator has been employed at Hamilton Senior High School in Western Australia to liaise between all members of the school community, conduct surveys of teachers, students, parents and employers, and stimulate the adjustment of the school's programs to the particular needs of its clientele. At the Parks Community Education Centre in South Australia the career education counsellor designs link courses in vocational skills, work experience programs, and career education courses, working with staff to develop an awareness of the problems of unemployed youth and a sensitivity to opportunities to develop students' confidence and competence in skills needed for entry into the workforce. At the Doveton Cluster of Schools, Victoria, two social workers and an equal opportunities consultant work in seven government and non-government, primary, secondary and technical schools, and in cooperation with seven community agencies to enhance the development of students' potential and assist them to greater access and choices of employment.

Vocational centres. Nine vocational reference centres for secondary schools and correspondence school students have been established in the two Queensland disadvantaged country areas, providing vocational

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guidance kits on loan to any parent, community group organisation or small school. The North-West Area in New South Wales has established a residential centre in Sydney to provide groups of ten to fifteen teenagers attending secondary schools in the area with four to six week programs designed to broaden their vocational and cultural horizons by provision of vocational guidance and experience through counselling; work experience programs and visits; training and experience in city living; and cultural experiences through excursions to theatres, museums and sporting activities. A Country/City Information Unit in South Australia has been established to attempt to overcome the information gap which restricts the awareness of country students and parents of education and work opportunities, and to be a referral point for other services.

Research activities. Research is being conducted into the motivation and achievement levels of students in the Bourke Area in New South Wales and into the relationship of schooling to job choice and transition from school to work. The experiences of school leavers in the area over the past ten years are being studied with a view to suggesting changes in schooling which could improve vocational guidance.

Curriculum development projects. Some disadvantaged schools and areas have made significant modifications to their curriculum to suit local needs, to open up options beyond those locally available and to make schooling more relevant to the life experience and futures of their students. Students at Mt Carmel School, Rosewater in South Australia are engaged in a research project, interviewing school leavers at Year 9 level to determine their reasons for leaving school, their employment since leaving, and their views on how school prepared them for the world of work, subsequently suggesting changes in the curriculum so that present and future students may find relevance and challenge in what is offered to them. Fifty-six Year 9 students at Bridgewater High School in Tasmania have been involved in the total planning, design, building and sale of a house, a project which linked the total school curriculum with practical skills and has been of great benefit to participants, particularly in relation to improving their self-confidence and decision-making skills. A number of disadvantaged senior high schools in Western Australia are providing alternative courses for students who are unable to find employment after leaving school at the normal school leaving age.

The action research nature of the Disadvantaged Schools Program assists school communities to identify needs and develop relevant programs which can be guided and supported to successful outcomes. The Program supports communication between and among teachers, students, parents and the community at both primary and secondary levels and is possibly the most effective of the Commission's

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Programs in encouraging alternative approaches to education, improving students' self-esteem and their learning outcomes and thus preparing them for working life.

General influence of the Commission

Apart from the effects of efforts to ease the school-work transition through projects funded within Program areas, there has been an overall effect through the widespread consultation undertaken by the Commission in the development and administration of its Programs. A major study being implemented in 1979 and 1980 is concentrating attention on those students who are aged 15 and 16 years, for many the last compulsory years of schooling and of significance for subsequent experiences in the adult world. Commissioners have embarked on a school visit program which will involve 10 per cent of all secondary schools in Australia. Discussions are being held with students, parents, teachers, administrators and employers, and with a wide range of education and community organisations to gain an accurate understanding of how these students are affected by their school experience and how they see their school experience in relation to their aspirations.

This paper has not discussed progress State systems are making in the area with their own resources: no doubt other papers given at the Conference will. Although the funds recommended by the Schools Commission to the Commonwealth Government for education in primary and secondary schools are a minor proportion of the total expenditure on schools in Australia the amount is significant as it often provides States with most of the extra funds available for remedying deficiencies, stimulating change and encouraging development.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Over recent years a number of reports has been written on the relationship of education and work in Australia.[11] The increasing interest has undoubtedly been due to the high and rising level of youth unemployment which is an issue of great concern to educators as well as the general Australian community. However, I believe it is a mistake to confuse the problems of youth unemployment with those of school to work transition. While schools can assist students to cope better with transition they are quite unable to create jobs. The problems of unemployment require far-reaching government economic and political policies beyond the scope of education. Nevertheless, because youth unemployment is likely to be a long-term problem, schools must address the relevance of their

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11. These include Australia, Transition From School to Work or Further Study, Paris, OECD, 1977, and reports of Committees chaired by Milligan (1976), Beltz (1977) and Campbell (1978).

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curriculum for students who will face a considerable period of their lives unemployed. While most people consider that preparation for the world of work is one of the purposes of schooling, it is not clear what priority this should have, nor how direct links between school and work should be, nor what other purposes schools should have.

It was hoped that the Williams Committee would throw some light on these issues. The Committee was asked 'when considering the relationship between the labour market and the education system to extend its review into secondary education as appropriate, having regard to the fact that a significant number of children do not proceed beyond Year 10 in secondary schools'.[12] The Committee recommended no dramatic changes of direction in current educational processes but did discuss the implications for schools of high levels of youth unemployment and the consequences of current community concern about literacy and numeracy and transition strategies. While rejecting that schools could make jobs, the Committee felt that they could contribute to increasing the relative productivity of juvenile labour by more effective teaching of reading and number work and encouraging a disciplined habit of work. The Committee endorsed current developments in such fields as careers education, curricula, vocational guidance, counselling, work experience and like courses, but did not attempt to suggest new strategies nor to say how the present plethora of activities could be moulded into a total coherent program or how they related to other aspects of schooling or employment. Overall the Committee has contributed very little to the analysis of school-work transition, which is not surprising in view of the complexities of the issues involved. In the last section of this paper I raise a number of the constraints and tensions influencing the rate and degree of progress possible and make some tentative suggestions about ways to move forward.

Work experience. In a comprehensive document reviewing work experience programs in all States of Australia, Peter Cole has shown they have several objectives including: to give students knowledge of a wide variety of employment fields and the world of work in general; to help students gain a greater knowledge of themselves and their abilities; to provide new aspirations for the less motivated and to involve both parents and employers in career exploration.[13] However, there is often a discrepancy between the

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12. Williams, B.R. (Chairman) Education, Training and Employment. Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education and Training, Canberra, AGPS, 1979, p.133.

13. Cole, P. School/Work Interface Project undertaken by the Victorian Education Department with funding from the Schools Commission. Three reports in press, Melbourne, Victorian Education Department of Education, 1979.

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reality of practice and the objectives of the programs. Students often participate in work experience only once in the school year, are insufficiently counselled, are not free to decide the most appropriate time and their parents are not involved. Decisions about which experience is appropriate to the students are often made without consulting the students and school staffs can be totally uninvolved in the process. There is, furthermore, often little if any dialogue between employers and the school. While some work experience programs are effective in involving parents and providing students with several different experiences, I believe some can be positively harmful in their effects. For example, in some schools students are streamed into under-achiever groups and given compulsory work experience, sex stereotyping of occupations is reinforced and staff are hostile to the concept because of administrative burdens. Students are restricted from work experience in occupations they are most unlikely to enter (e.g. 'underachievers' working with doctors, 'gifted' working with factory hands). The limited nature of many programs may result in students gaining a distorted view of work. Work experience programs must be supported by the organisation and curriculum emphasis of the school.

Career education. Like work experience programs, career education programs can be either effective or ineffective, but in my view they can be dangerous when seen as the total solution to students' problems in transition to work. The existing divisions between academic and non-academic courses could be reinforced for upper and lower socio-economic students if career education is too pragmatically based. In her study of career education, Catherine Blakers asserts that in many Australian schools career education is 'still at the stage of groping towards a purpose, catering partially or selectively for the students in the school, fitting in as a peripheral adjunct to the main curriculum, rationalising approaches which are in fact dictated by outside circumstances'.[14] System and national level support for curriculum design and consultative services are critical if there is to be a substantial integration of aims and content throughout the curriculum. Apart from a major revision of courses and syllabuses, considerable inservice of most subject teachers could be necessary to implement such a fundamental change. At present career counsellors are often isolated from the rest of the school staff. Careers teachers who see their role as fostering in students greater self-awareness, involvement and control over their environment could be the most effective.

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14. Blakers, C. Issues in Career Education. Melbourne, Australian Frontier, 1978.

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School structures. In my view, the present size and organisational structure of many secondary schools and their separation from primary schools inhibits cooperative planning across the curriculum. Final year examinations, while under review in most States, still limit the possibilities of change. Courses are too often geared to students going on to tertiary studies, and planned and executed within rigid faculty compartments. Presumed early school leavers in many schools are segregated into special classes for practical skills and information on the assumption that they may not need general understandings. The Tasmanian Careers Education Working Party's Report on Transition Education pointed out that students need new curriculum offerings together with personal support that does not diminish their dignity or self esteem and allows them to feel satisfaction in accomplishment.[15] Technical, vocational, skill training and academic areas in school programs should be equally valued. I believe that systems need to become more flexible at all levels to extend the educational process well beyond compulsory schooling and encourage re-entry by students into the system.

Inter-agency cooperation. The reports of the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty have emphasised the lack of formal liaison between the departments (Education, Social or Community Welfare, Health, Labour, Immigration, Youth Affairs) which meet the welfare needs of schools and the lack of coordination of policies.[16] The extent of informal liaison varies from State to State and area to area but is rarely efficient. I believe a national policy for youth is urgently needed to give direction to States, which have the primary responsibility for development in areas of guidance, counselling and school social work, and assist in the overall planning of resources.

Research. There is still insufficient research and feedback about the effect of the various projects being implemented to ease school-work transition and the kinds of processes which are most successful. These need to be analysed to identify the significant factors producing positive results. In my view self-evaluation reports carried out by the people involved in individual projects can provide the most valuable indicative material.

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15. Careers Education Working Party. Report on Transition Education: Extracts. Hobart, Education Department, Tasmania, 1978, p.11.

16. Craft, M. School Welfare Provision in Australia. Commission of Inquiry into Poverty. Poverty and Education Series: Aspects of School Welfare Provision. Canberra, AGPS, 1977.

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Technology. Increasing technological and social change makes it imperative that schools take more seriously the preparation they give students for adult life. The silicon chip will revolutionise work and employment patterns, increasing job mobility and occupational changes throughout life and further blurring the boundaries between work, education and leisure. Karmel has proposed more radical ways of dealing with transition by softening the sharp edges between the world of school and the world of work, and assisting in the process whereby young people become autonomous, independent adults, able to cope with life and life choices.17 Recurrent education has to be taken seriously. Schools cannot solve the work transition problem by themselves. I believe that a new kind of thinking is needed to reject the assumption that all education should take place in a few years in a lock-step fashion. New institutions which allow students to leave, work, re-enter throughout their lives are called for.

Community awareness. There is a general lack of information and understanding in the community about the rapid changes in society and how schools are attempting to prepare students to cope with those changes. The media reinforces community pressure for accountability, matriculation and improved literacy, and often works against the genuine efforts and concern of many school communities adequately to prepare their students for adult life in the late twentieth century. I believe more research is needed on how to change ideas, and informed action is essential to promote in the general community some understanding of the issues being addressed by the schools and some awareness of the options available to individuals at all stages of life, in private as well as public roles.

Staff. Changes are difficult to implement in schools where staff are fairly conservative, wanting to build on what already exists, modifying and adapting courses rather than examining and searching for more appropriate programs. Inservice is not always seen as an integral part of programs involving educational change. Yet teacher attitudes and behaviour are powerful elements in the learning situation. Some staff/student relationships are such that students leave school without a secure relationship base or having experienced close, functional and supportive relationships with their teachers. In my view staff must be equipped to value and understand the students most in need of assistance.

Parents. At secondary level it is difficult to involve parents and community in a meaningful way, often because of the wider geographical spread of families and because both parents work. However, staff need to develop an understanding of family background and its possible effects on student choice. Special relationships

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17. Karmel, P.H. Education and the Workforce, Education News 16 (1): 1977.

with the families of students and other individuals or out-of-school groups with an important influence on students' lives should be developed. Parents usually have to be convinced that they are significant contributors to career education for their children.

Students. Present barriers to smooth transition from school to work include the failure of some students to develop self-confidence and social competence because of failure in the school environment and their isolation from the realities of the work environment, together with their inability to evaluate their personal qualities and relate that self knowledge to job aspirations. Children who leave school early are particularly disadvantaged, moving into the workforce at a much younger age than those who stay on to complete secondary schooling. They are less competent and confident, with more experience of failure and without the recognised educational qualifications to improve their futures. I believe it is important to listen to what students are saying about their school experience. In Connell et al's study the personal concerns of both male and female high school students were overwhelmingly related to choosing a future job and doing well at school. However, students considered that the schools' offerings were often irrelevant to their real concerns and, particularly in the upper years, they were discontent with the schools' performance in issues of social importance.[18] Edgar's study of Victorian adolescents showed that when students were asked what else schools could have done for them, only 16 per cent said they wanted more specific job skills and subjects geared to a career of any kind.[19] School leavers generally wished schools had given them a better grounding in everyday knowledge about practical living and the working world. Other recent surveys show a high level of agreement among students about how to improve schooling. They want a closer association between what they learn to think about and the problems of society, and more assistance in their own personal development including more basic skills in handling human relationships. Students recognise that school-work transition is more than just job skills or practical knowledge narrowly defined. Rather it marks the transition from childhood to adulthood - independence, competence, responsibility and social respect. Serious consideration of students' views in my opinion would inevitably lead to modification of the existing curriculum in most schools.

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18. Connell, W.F. et al. 12 to 20: Studies of City Youth. Sydney, Hicks Smith, 1975.

19. Edgar, D.E. School-work Transition in Rural Areas. Unpublished paper, 1979. Forthcoming publication Coping with Adolescence: A Study of Competence, Autonomy and Conformity in Australian Adolescents.

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Curriculum. A major problem with the plethora of special activities related to the interface between school and work is that they have often been added on to existing secondary programs rather than being built into the curriculum for all students. I believe schools have a responsibility to assist all young people to make a smooth transition from dependence on family and school to the independence of adulthood. All teachers then should give sustained attention to building the skills of literacy and reasoning in every class as indispensible means of furthering understandings. All staff, in consultation with parents and students, should examine the curriculum, its balance, suitability and options and agree on what the tasks of the school are. The experiences of school leavers should be followed up and reflected on to determine their significance for school programs. Links between the school and the adult world should be strengthened. The building of social and personal confidence in students should be given priority. The study of work, both paid and unpaid, as a central human activity should be part of the curriculum for all students. Schools should be places where concern and contact among students, staff and other adults confirms the common humanity of all. Teachers have a special responsibility to assist all students to develop into mature, helpful, loving, human beings who can communicate with others and interpret information and argument, and who have the knowledge, understanding and skills necessary to make considered choices, the self-esteem to live confidently and the power to change circumstances.

This paper has argued that the Schools Commission, with the co-operation of State systems, has contributed to opening up the possible range of strategies schools can use to broaden students' understandings and experience. However, there are a number of constraints limiting the progress possible in the area of school-work transition. The crucial focus for action remains with the schools, and the willingness and capacity of school communities fundamentally to reassess the preparation they are giving students for adult life, adjusting their approaches accordingly and creating caring communities where both education and people are valued. In my view, the important issues now facing educators are how to assist school communities to become involved and how to break down the existing barriers between school and work and home.

Shirley Randell

10 August, 1979